Jill Webb Training

CPD MEMBER
The CPD Certification Service

WELCOME!

Professional Curiosity

Cloverleaf Advocacy

Learning Objectives

By the end of the training, participants will be able to:

- Define professional curiosity
- Understand the significance of professional curiosity
- Develop an awareness of what can go wrong when we do not use professional curiosity
- Provide examples of both proper and improper applications of professional curiosity
- Evaluate their own skills in relation to professional curiosity
- Reflect on the influence of personal bias
- Recognise the connection between professional curiosity and professional boundaries
- Identify two ways of how they will change or develop their practice to embed t use of Professional Curiosity in the future

As We Start

Professional curiosity is key in many professions, for example a debt advice worker or a probation officer will need these skills.

Therefore, we will use a wide range of examples in the training.

As you work through examples and case studies, reflect on the skills you are developing through the training and how you will be able to use these in your role.

What is Professional Curiosity?

Professional curiosity is a concept which has been recognised as important in the area of safeguarding children for many years. More recently, Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) have highlighted a similar need for professional curiosity in safeguarding adults with care and support needs. *Source - Braye et al., 2014; Preston-Shoot, 2017*

What is professional curiosity and why is it important?
Professional curiosity is where a practitioner explores and proactively tries to understand what is happening within a family or for an individual, rather than making assumptions or taking a single source of information and accepting it at face value. *Source - Leeds.Gov.uk*

The term professional curiosity, sometimes called respectful nosiness, is used to describe an in-depth interest in those you are working with by exploring and understanding what is happening or, may be happening, rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. *Source - West Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board*

In Summary …

Professional curiosity is an approach to work that involves actively seeking to understand a situation, individual or family without making assumptions or accepting information at face value.

It requires asking questions, challenging perceptions, and gathering information from various sources to gain a complete picture, particularly to identify hidden risks like abuse or neglect.

This mindset is a crucial element of safeguarding in children's and adult services, ensuring professionals can make informed decisions and intervene effectively.

Reminder

Professional curiosity is a fundamental attribute in many fields, especially those involving direct work with people.

This includes:

- Social care
- Healthcare
- Education
- Management

It does not only apply to statutory services, also to the voluntary and charitable sector.

Key Aspects of Professional Curiosity

Active Inquiry

Professionals are encouraged to actively explore and investigate, rather than relying on initial information or beliefs.

Open-mindedness

It involves maintaining a neutral, open mind, "fresh eyes," and a willingness to test professional assumptions.

Information Triangulation

Professionals seek evidence from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, and reports, to form a comprehensive view of a situation.

Asking Questions

This includes asking direct, sensitive questions and holding difficult conversations to uncover underlying issues or unmet needs.

Self-Awareness

Professionals need to be aware of their own biases and how these might influence their judgements.

Seeing Beyond the Obvious

It means looking for subtle cues, non-verbal behaviours, and other less obvious indicators of potential harm or vulnerability.

Why is Professional Curiosity Important?

By encouraging individuals to ask questions, seek new perspectives, and challenge existing assumptions, it drives continuous learning and improvement.

This mindset not only enhances problem-solving abilities but also strengthens collaboration and adaptability, ultimately contributing to a more dynamic and effective professional environment.

In social care, professional curiosity can help us identify the less obvious signs of abuse and neglect.

It’s a mindset that allows us to gather relevant information and understand the risks an individual may be facing from *their* perspective.

Once we understand these risks, we can respond to them.

Source - Ann Craft Trust

Why is Professional Curiosity Important? Another Way Of Looking At This

Safeguarding

It helps identify less obvious signs of abuse, neglect, or significant harm that might otherwise be missed.

Informed Decisions

Gathering more information leads to more accurate and defensible decisions and assessments.

Early Intervention

By seeing past the surface, professionals can intervene earlier to prevent situations from deteriorating.

Respectful Uncertainty

It fosters a culture of "respectful uncertainty," where professionals acknowledge what they don't know and actively seek to find out.

When There Is A Lack Of Professional Curiosity

National Review into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.

Professionals had only a limited understanding of what daily life was like for Star ... disruption due to constant moves …t he fact that she may have been experiencing serious and systematic physical and emotional abuse was never really considered and addressed.

Something to think about ….

“Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another.”

Source - Alfred Adler

John

- John was an 88-year-old man who was partially sighted with a range of mediation conditions - he died in June 2022
- He had led an active life, being a postman, an avid collector of all things Rupert Bear and a carer for his wife at the end of her life
- In 2020 after a fall, he had respite care and he decided to stay permanently at this home
- As his sight got worse, he became very reclusive
- In 2022 John decided to stop eating and drinking in order to die
- A best interest meeting was held
- His niece who held Health Power of Attorney was clear that John would not want to go to hospital
- A number of discussions were held about John's capacity
- A review was held in the circumstances around his death
- See https://www.westsussexsab.org.uk/media/q4hn41u4/sar-john-review-report-13-12-23.pdf

Key Findings

- *Professional curiosity*: Limited evidence of professional curiosity resulting in significant information not being known by professionals which could have changed decision making and outcomes
- *Defensible decision making*: As there was a lack of professional curiosity defensible decision making may come into question
- *The voice of families*: John's niece, was not contacted by professionals as part of their assessment process or triaging of safeguarding concerns
- *Multi-agency working*: Lost opportunities identified where agencies could have jointly assessed risk, John's capacity and developed/implemented a coordinated care plan
- Silo working and professional accountability and ownership
- *Self-neglect and safeguarding*: Sussex Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures regarding Self-Neglect not initiated or followed
- *Agency resources*: Limited staffing created unnecessary delays for assessments and timely sharing of information across system partners
- *Mental capacity*: A multi-agency agreement of John's capacity status, especially in relation to his executive functioning was never reached

What Might Have Led To A Better Outcome?

- With an advocate representing John and his niece, wider information could have been gathered about John's life experiences, his own personal traumas and possible triggers which led to the deterioration in his mental health and ultimately the decision to end his life
- This information and John's voice, could have been shared within a multi disciplinary meeting, which in turn could have helped decision making in relation to John's capacity and level of care required
- Reasonable adjustments could have been explored to enable John to continue his interest in audio books, his concerns around hospital could have been addressed and his worries that had manifested following receipt of the birthday card from his cousin, triggering historic anxieties of false wrong-doing, could all have resulted in more specific counselling and therapy

Defensible Decision Making

Defensible decision-making in safeguarding refers to a process where professionals can justify and account for their actions, even in the event of a poor outcome.

A defensible decision can withstand scrutiny, such as from a court or inquiry, because it is based on evidence, analysis, and established procedure

Source - Nottinghamshire County Council

Why do you think the review linked defensible decision making to professional curiosity?

Looking At This Another Way

https://youtu.be/XEdNGbnvzRs

Identify one key message you will take from this video

What Can Go Wrong – Barriers

- Disguised compliance
- Professional optimism
- Normalisation e.g. overfamiliar with the setting or individual
- Accumulating Risk
- Professional Deference
- Confirmation Bias
- “Knowing But Not Knowing”
- Lack of Confidence in Managing Tension
- Inability to Deal With Uncertainty
- Limited or time constrained supervision
- Lack of reflective practice

What Can Go Wrong Additional Ideas From Group 01.10.2025

- Intimidation
- Personal wellbeing
- Preconceived ideas once read reports etc.
- ‘Collusion’ – ‘you know what that person is like…’
- ‘Shut out’ when you try to work with someone in a professionally curious way
- Our own professional backgrounds – can influence how we see a situation or how we want to advise – can get boundaries muddled

As In All Aspects Of Our Work

The only tool we have is ourselves.

So we are going to look at three areas:

1. Your strengths and areas for development
2. Impact of bias
3. How professional boundaries overlap into this area of work

A Chance To Think About Your Practice

Reflective Questions (From Emily Smith podcast)

1. How do you build in time to listen to people's stories and help to piece together what is happening in their lives?

2. What support and skills do you need to remain curious in your role?

3. What can you do to build your mental and physical resources and invest in your wellbeing?

4. How can you actively support a safe space in your team in which colleagues are able to reflect on their experiences?

Impact of Bias

Bias profoundly limits and distorts professional curiosity by narrowing a professional's perspective, causing them to miss crucial information, and reinforcing pre-existing beliefs.

Instead of exploring a situation openly, bias leads to making assumptions and accepting information at face value, which can have significant consequences, particularly in high-stakes fields like safeguarding.

Source - The Ann Craft Trust

Finally the Need to have Good Boundaries

A boundary is ‘a line which marks the limits of an area; a dividing line.’

Source - Collins Dictionary

Professional boundaries help differentiate between actions that are professionally appropriate and those that are inappropriate or unprofessional.

They can be represented through the metaphors of lines, fences, or guardrail. (Doel et al. 2010; Austin et al. 2006).

What Do We Mean By A Professional Boundary…?

The Directory of Social Change states that a professional boundary is:

- A sense of professional identity and self definition that has consistency and cohesion over time
- The framework within which the worker-client relationship occurs
- The line between the self of client and self of worker
- Prescribes a system of limits and expectations

Frank Cooper

Professional boundaries are a set of guidelines, expectations and rules which set the ethical and technical standards in the social care environment.

They set limits for safe, acceptable and effective behaviour by workers.

The earliest known set of professional boundaries within Western society is the Hippocratic Oath.

The oath included, amongst other things, the following boundaries:

- You must understand the limits of your knowledge and not work beyond them
- You must work with the good of the patient to the best of your ability and not do any harm to patients
- You should not enter into sexual relations with anyone who has connection to your work
- You should keep the details of your work with clients confidential

Frank Cooper - Continued

Although the oath was directed at medical professionals, it featured many concepts that we use within the boundaries for social care professionals to this very day.

Why a Professional Boundary is Important in Relation to Professional Curiosity

- Safety – own and those we work with
- Consistency over time
- Model behaviour
- Makes expectations clear and consistency
- Protects from over dependency and allegation of favouritism
- It helps others to see you as a professional
- It can be a legal obligation eg not to discriminate (Equality Act 2010)
- It helps you and those you work with to be very clear about what you will or will not do in different situations
- It keeps you and the people you are working with safe
- It develops a climate of mutual respect

What Can Make it Hard to Maintain Boundaries?

- Because you want to be empathetic (especially in the caring professionals)
- Sometimes you can find a piece of work has gone on and you need a change
- We get over comfortable with clients, colleagues and managers
- Working with someone with complex needs
- Someone else has poor boundaries eg I live too far away to come in regularly can the meeting be on a different day?
- Tiredness, illness other stuff going on
- Potential issues when workers don't understand unconscious bias don't keep boundaries around eg race and sexuality
- Different ages accessing services with different ages of workers
- Different perceptions eg what is untidy
- Inconsistent expectations from others – remember you need to maintain YOUR boundaries

Useful Tools to Support Boundaries

- Own your own role – be self-aware
- Qualifications in your area of work
- Knowledge and understanding of the organisation’s aims
- Follow policies and procedures
- Listening skills
- Get the job done
- Crisis management

Professional Curiosity And Boundaries

Is it appropriate ….?

…you visit a client who has been assessed as lacking capacity.
You notice a man who you have not met before in the house

Which of these is appropriate?

- To ask who the man is
- To ask if he is living in the house
- To ask if they are in a relationship
- To ask what their sex life is like (maybe not this but I am sure you can see where I am going with this)

As We End Some Practical Tips

- Observe patterns of behaviour and non-verbal cues. What are they 'not' saying?
- Understand a families 'lived' experience. Where possible observe levels of care, emotions and behaviours but remember appearance is not always the same as reality!
- Build a trusting relationship; work 'with' clients
- Work within clear boundaries
- Prepare how you will 'approach' a family or individual before your visit
- Present alternative hypotheses
- Keep assessments free from jargon; be specific, use examples and give detailed accounts of what you see/hear
- Reflect on your own assumptions and bias

Overview – what did we plan to do?

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Now To End

Questions

Call to action – we challenged you to identify two actions to take away

Feedback

Thank you

Resource Bank

- www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/one%20minute%20guides/202%20-%20professional%20curiosity.pdf
- https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/content-pages/podcasts/what-is-professional-curiosity/#:~:text=Professional%20curiosity%20supports%20practitioners%20to,practitioners%20might%20develop%20their%20practice.
- https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/z5nl0yiw/adults_professional_curiosity_sb_web.pdf
- https://www.anncrafttrust.org/professional-curiosity-safeguarding-adults-an-essential-introduction/
- https://www.westsussexsab.org.uk/media/q4hn41u4/sar-john-review-report-13-12-23.pdf
- https://www.westsussexsab.org.uk/media/p4uljy3p/professional-curiosity-0124.pdf

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THANK YOU!

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